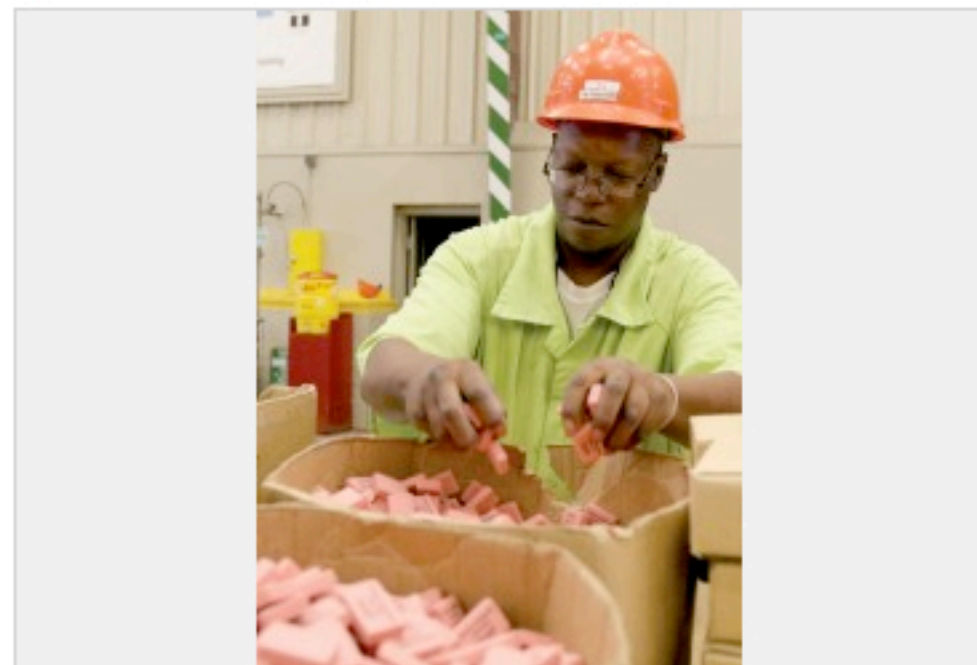


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Folsom Prison inmates do a good turn for students

By Laura Newell Telegraph staff writer



Philip Wood • The Telegraph

Folsom Prison inmate Sean Ferguson places erasers in student supply kits along the assembly line at the prison.



Folsom Prison inmates are helping students prepare for school.

Eric Reslock, Prison Industry Authority chief officer of public affairs, said 75 inmates assembled 146,000 school supply kits for "K to College," an Oakland-based non-profit that provides the supplies free to low-income public school children.

The program began in January 2009 with volunteers assembling the kits. Approximately 300 kits were put together and soon grew to 27,000 last spring. When the program's projected volume for fall reached 146,000, the volunteer-based option seemed unrealistic.

"We started as a completely volunteer process, with the local YMCA and grew," said Benito Delgado-Olson, 26, executive director of "K to College." "Then, we realized that we hit the peak of our volunteers. I started thinking how can we expand the program."

Senator Mark Desaulnier, who chairs the State Administration, General Government and Judicial Subcommittee, worked to form the partnership between "K to College" and Folsom Prison. He volunteered at a "K to College" assembly event in his district.

"I saw an opportunity to help a program that provides over 30,000 underprivileged students in my district with nearly two

million worth of school supplies," said Desaulnier. "It also provided an opportunity for inmates to give back to the community as a part of the rehabilitation process."

Joel Silas III, 52, works shop floor control at Folsom Prison and said he enjoys participating.

"I've personally been taking for so long, it's nice that I've been given the privilege to give something," Silas said.

Mark Stewart, prison industries administrator of operations, said Silas volunteered for the project.

Stewart said the ultimate goal is 150,000 bags.

"The numbers are mind boggling when you think about the (amount of) products that go into the 150,000 bags," Stewart said. "They (inmates) have to unpack all supplies out of boxes then repackage them into groups for the bag stuffing."

Delgado-Olson said each inmate that is working is receiving a packet as well for family members.

"When you think about local schools needing these things, but not having the buying power, it's a really great idea," Stewart said.

The program is funded through a partnership with "Give Something Back Office Supplies" and aid from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Contingency Fund, part of the federal Stimulus package.

"This program is an excellent example of how the non-profit and for-profit sectors can collaborate to solve social problems," said Mike Hannigan, president and cofounder of Give Something Back Office Supplies. This collaboration enables "K to College" to produce one supply kit worth approximately \$65 at a cost of only \$22.

The two-to-one match of private donations made the program eligible for the federal grant.

"We are looking to expand (into schools) in Sacramento and Folsom," Delgado-Olson said. "We may have a couple of pilot programs soon."